

Psychology 2200

Developmental Psychology I: Fundamentals

Epistemic Development

no textbook reading



1

learning objectives

- explain what epistemology is and give a few examples of why it matters
- describe the two claims of epistemic development theory
- define and illustrate each of the four epistemic stances and explain how they are different from one another
- describe the two developmental processes along with their respective achievements
- explain what happens to someone if they fail to make one of the achievements



2

The Matrix (1999)

Movie premise: aliens created the Matrix, a kind of mind-prison that seems like the world we all think we know. The Matrix prison keep humans under control so aliens can use humans for energy (like batteries)

About the Matrix Prison

metaphor: we are prisoners to rigid thinking, institutionalized control allow ourselves to be subjected to it because not ready to be "unplugged" we are so hopelessly dependent on the system that we fight to protect it Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" - people don't know that they are prisoners

Escaping the Matrix

metaphor for encouraging us to ask critical questions about our own world

Neo asks questions -> gets unplugged from the Matrix

"Kansas is going bye-bye" -> a wild and crazy experience (crisis)

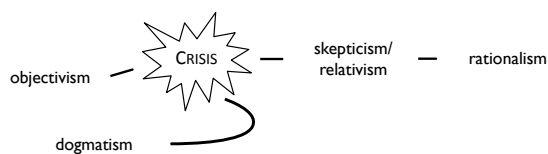
but Neo goes from being a trancelike slave to becoming awake

Socrates: the only thing we know for certain is that nothing is certain

3

main points of the lecture

- **claim 1:** people have different perspectives on matters of knowing
- **claim 2:** these differing perspectives follow a developmental trajectory and process
- **claim 3:** people can stagnate and thus end up at any stance



4

epistemic development



- not a urinary tract infection
- A.K.A. reflective judgment, belief entitlement
- definition: a person's assumptions about matters of truth, and the methods one uses to learn the truth.
- answer to the question: "how do you know what you know?"
- so what?
- **claim 1:** people have different perspectives on matters of knowing
- **claim 2:** these differing perspectives follow a developmental trajectory and process
- **claim 3:** people can stagnate and thus end up at any stance

5

how much do you agree?

"I believe truth exists but that people can't know it without knowing God. That's why we need religion. The bible is literally true. For example, Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (The same goes in my religion... if not Christian)

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neutral
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

fundamentalism

6

how much do you agree?

"Truth isn't all that complicated. All you have to do is open your eyes to it and truth shows itself. When people argue about matters of fact, it's because they're biased or uninformed."

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neutral
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

objectivism

7

how much do you agree?

"I doubt that truth exists in the first place."

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- neutral
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree

skepticism

8

how much do you agree?

"I believe truth exists. But people can't know the truth without some help. That's why we need science. Science has proven certain theories to be true with hard facts."

strongly disagree
somewhat disagree
neutral
somewhat agree
strongly agree

scientism

9

how much do you agree?

"Truth exists but it's impossible to know it for certain. The best we can do is create theories about truth. If you use certain methods in trying to figure it out, you're likely to reduce the likelihood of some theories. But you'll never know for sure..."

strongly disagree
somewhat disagree
neutral
somewhat agree
strongly agree

rationalism

10

how much do you agree?

"I know my truth. What's true for me may not be true for you. So I'm not sure that I know what's true for you."

strongly disagree
somewhat disagree
neutral
somewhat agree
strongly agree

relativism

11

I. objectivism

"I know what I know. I saw it with my own eyes."

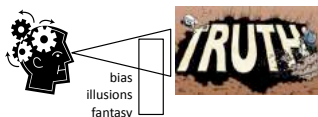
assumption: objective truth is automatically available for all those who see it for what it is

knowledge acquisition: direct sensory access to objective truth

source of disagreement: omissions, errors, ignoring facts, bias

belief justification strategy: claims that none needed

doubt about beliefs: bias



12

2. dogmatism

"Psychology _____ is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science."
or... "I know the truth because I know the Bible"

assumption: all ordinary human understanding is inescapably person-relative; without access to divine guidance, we cannot know anything for certain.

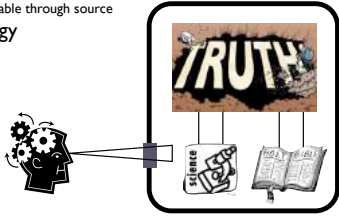
knowledge acquisition: through some all-knowing source

doubt about beliefs: escapable through source

belief justification strategy

- referencing
- reject need for interpretation

secular: scientism
religious: fundamentalism



13

3. skepticism/relativism

"Sean Spicer, our press secretary – gave alternative facts"
"that your truth, but it's not true for me"

assumption: no single truth exists

knowledge acquisition: entirely person-relative
truth does not exist (skepticism) or...
many truths exist (relativism)

doubt about beliefs: absolute

belief justification strategy:

- Intuitionism (doing what emotions suggest)
- Conformism (doing the done thing)
- Indifferentism (tossing a coin)



14

4. rationalism

"what evidence supports that opinion?"

assumption: truth exists but can never be known for certain. Theories attempt to simulate Truth. Theory can be scrutinized using empirical and rational strategies.

knowledge acquisition: persons constructing stories

but not all perspectives equal

ways of deciphering better theories from worse ones

doubt about beliefs: absolute but differentiated

belief justification strategy: reasonable interpretation

- internal coherence
- consistent with observation



15

when does cognitive development finish?



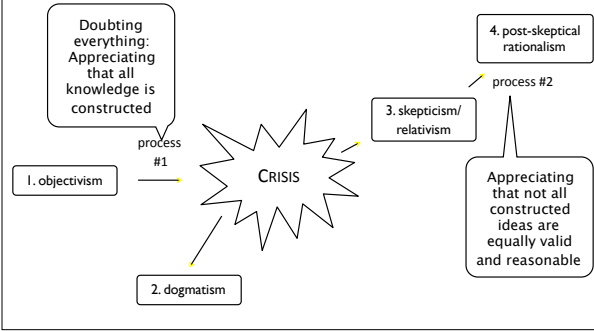
- A. age 0
 - it never starts/ don't believe cognitive development exists
 - some time before birth
- B. about age 6
- C. about age 15
- D. about age 30
- E. can be later than 30



16

epistemic development

typically 15-25 years



17

two developmental processes

- process #1: **The Poisoned Well Principle**
 - the seeding and growth of doubt about beliefs
 - eventually doubting everything (Crisis)
 - achievement: #1 appreciating that all knowledge arbitrary, a construction on someone's imagination, and a matter of perspective (achieving relativism/skepticism)
 - failure = retreat to dogmatism
- process #2: **The Better Practices of Reason**
 - developing a **reasoned approach** to scrutinizing different perspectives
 - achievement #2: appreciating that not all perspectives are equally valid
 - failure = stagnation in relativism/skepticism

18

implications

can proceed to the endpoint: rationalism
can diverge or retreat to dogmatism
can stagnate in relativism/skepticism

19

What effect does a university education have on a student's thinking?

more knowledge/facts?
change *how* you think in general?



20
